



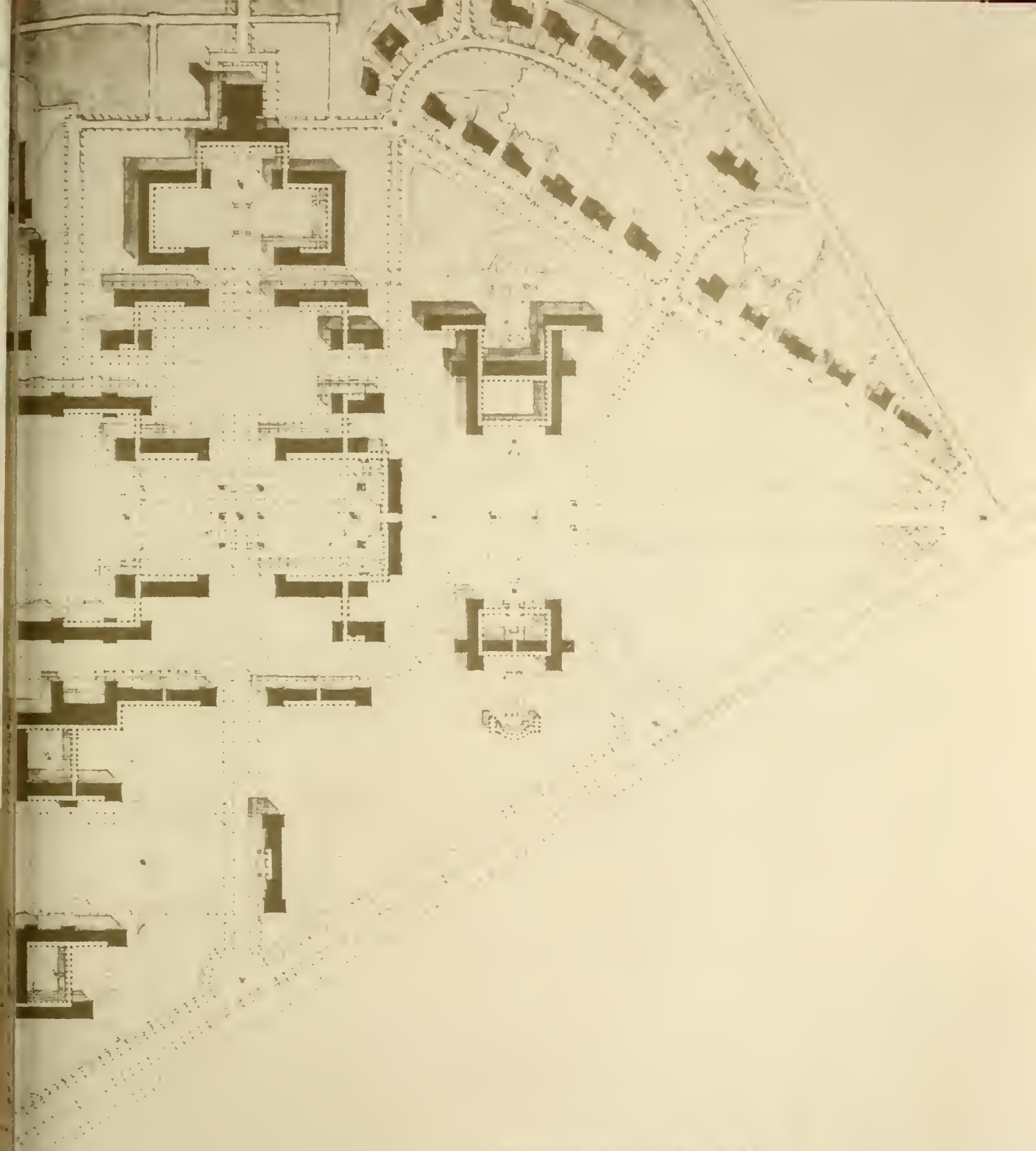
ARCHITECTURE AT RICE

GENERAL PLAN
WILLIAM RICE INSTITUTE
HOUSTON, TEXAS

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HOUSTON AND NEW YORK



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GENERAL PLAN
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HOUSTON TEXAS

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THINKING AND DOING.

HOUSTON, TEXAS

MARCH, 1963





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THE PEOPLE'S ARCHITECTS

is a program sponsored by the Department of Architecture, Rice University, to commemorate its semicentennial, 1912-62.

This text by Chairman William W. Caudill explains the concepts of the program and the approach to architecture of the eight architects who participated in this program.



When Rice University was founded in 1912, the Department of Architecture was one of the four original departments. Thus this semicentennial year has special significance for the architectural students, their professors, and the alumni. In addition to participating in the University's academic festival, the Department of Architecture held its own celebration under the direction of Professor Harry S. Ransom, who executed the graphics and designed the medallions for the honorees. He is also authoring the forthcoming book to be published by the University of Chicago Press which explains the concept of the program and portrays the thinking and works of the architectural honorees. The concept is to substantiate the fact that Architecture, among other things, is a social art.

Rice honored eight great American architects: John Lyon Reid, O'Neil Ford, Victor Gruen, I. M. Pei, Vernon DeMars, Pietro Belluschi, Charles M. Goodman. Marshall Shaffer was posthumously selected for honors. The great contributions of these men have not been fully recognized by either the public or the profession. Although they are highly respected by their colleagues, they are not categorized solely as "form-makers", or "architects' architects." Their uniqueness lies in also being architects for people, or as Rice calls them, the people's architects.

Rice University has focused attention on a new breed of architect: the hard-nosed pros who have innate and highly developed design talent, who possess deep sensitivity to people's needs, who have a profound feeling of social responsibility,

and who have successfully incorporated human values into their buildings. These Twentieth Century architects are not only aware of the fast-moving social changes, but are causing them. Their goal is to give people houses, schools, churches, hospitals, factories, and shopping centers that are beautiful as well as efficient and economical. They desire to make this world a place in which many people, as contrasted to the privileged few, have a pleasant, inspiring environment for living, learning, praying, working, traveling and shopping. Their real clients are the people who use their buildings. They help people -- great numbers of people -- through their architecture.

Rice embarked upon this program because of what is happening in our country and the world and for what probably will happen. Perhaps the concept is being honored as much as the eight men.

Recent population predictions indicate that there will be twice the number of people on this earth within the next forty years. This means twice the problems, or more. Dying, decaying cities now exist. What will happen a few years from now? Who is really trying to do something about it? Developers? Obviously not. Money lenders? Not many. But a few socially conscious architects -- the people's architects -- are trying to carry the burden. There is a need for more of them. Within the next few years a maximum effort must be made using a fresh approach to solving the great problems caused by the trend toward urbanization. Architects and planners who are sensitive to the needs of a centralized population are the only hope.

Inevitably a large percentage of the world's population must dwell in cities. In this country on the salt water rim of the U. S. there will be three giant cities: one extending from Boston to Washington, D.C., one extending from New Orleans to Houston, and another from Los Angeles to San Diego. A fourth will develop as a giant fresh water city from Detroit to Chicago. Other great centers of population will develop in the plains; for example, a few years of expansion will merge Dallas and Fort Worth into one tremendous city. Expansion of this magnitude brings trouble.

Look what expansion in the last few years has done to areas of the U. S.! The colorful forests around Boston, New York, Washington, and Chicago have been scraped clean. Life has been drained out of the rich, green, life-producing swamps around New Orleans. The spacious beauty of the rolling plains around Tulsa and Omaha is permanently marred. The beautiful hills around San Francisco have been scarred. Nature has been replaced with mad-made uglies under the guise of progress. This is progress? This is devastation.

When the population of the world doubles in forty years, will the number of cars double? More than likely triple. What about the need for land? Because now the space for cars nearly equals the space for homes? But the problem is not a matter of where to put these things. There is enough space. The problem is how.

Will the number of billboards double? Unless the trend is stopped, no one will be able to see any of the landscape, assuming some is left. On some roads today the only available view is that contrived by hucksters. These beauty-butchers now must have billboards in pairs to carry their message from Madison Avenue.

If the awful signs don't cover the view, giant car racks will. Americans seem to want to stack people and cars as high as possible, and they really don't seem to care where they put these crates -- over a famous landmark such as Grand Central Station or in the middle of a beautiful university campus. The precious sky is not only being filled with carbonmonoxide and evil smelling gases, but is pock marked with enormous crates. One talks of air rights: rights to build a college over a railroad yard (might not be a bad idea at that); rights to straddle a church with an office building. To developers there is pie in the sky. In the future there may be no view of the sky, just as now there is little view of the land.

All the problems will not be in the great metropolitan centers. The perfecting of the communications satellites and the developing of cheap receiving transistors put the remotest areas into cultural closeness. Before too long anyone, any place, will be able to afford a small transistor TV set. The Punjabs in northern India will be as close to Lincoln Center as South Houstonians. When this happens, the world will be in for a big change -- sociologically and architecturally.

In the past the progress of a country depended largely on its natural resources. In the future the chief products for import will be services instead of goods. This means the so-called impoverished countries, without material things to sell or trade, may some day prosper by selling their services. Since travel now is not a matter of distance but of time, there seems to be no reason why communities whose chief commodities are services can not thrive, whether they be located in the barren plains of west Texas or the lush jungles of Cambodia.

Faster transportation, expanding cities, perfected communications and saleable services are the forces which will shape things to come. It will be a builder's world. It could be a beautiful one. Or, if the trend continues, it could be one big junk heap. A nuclear war is not needed; just let the current merciless landscapers continue their destruction. The hope for a beautiful future lies in more people's architects assuming their rightful leadership in making this world a pleasant, inspiring place.

The planned parenthood group obviously might do some good about the overcrowded situation, but the problem is more than more people occupying more space. There will be plenty of land for private dwellings and a parcel of land for each family if the world's population quadruples in 40 years. Although water and food most certainly will be a problem, there is a good chance technology can solve that before the time arrives. There is a good chance, too, that the problem of shelter will be solved satisfactorily by then, but shelter is not architecture. It is a part of architecture, but not all. "Architecture," as Percival Goodman would say, "is shelter engineering plus." It is this "plus factor" that makes it architecture. It is the "plus factor" that concerns human values and aesthetic sensibility.

Who is to save the world from being aesthetically butchered? To answer, one must ascertain who the builders are, because they are so often the wreckers -- some wreck the old to build the new, some do their wrecking in building the new. Wreckers or builders, they are the developers, loan agencies, insurance companies, contractors, material manufacturers, architects, engineers, and city

planners. Take a close look at each one.

Most developers (thank God for the exceptions) are out for the "quick buck." "Bulldoze the trees in the interest of expediency," they say. Loan companies operate for profit. There is nothing wrong with that provided it is not at the expense of good design. But just try to get a loan for a home that represents the most advanced design and technology! Money still speaks louder than aesthetics with insurance companies, too. The business of a good contractor is to build and build well, regardless of looks. The materials people have great influence on the appearance of buildings. Today these manufacturers seem to have a greater influence than most architects, and for the most part, are a bad influence. Super-salesmanship sold acres of schoolhouse walls of glassblock, millions of tons of enameled metal for skyscrapers, but the result was not better architecture. There are hundreds of glassblock schools -- ugly inside and out -- and nearly as many "tin can" office buildings to prove it. As for the engineers, bless their souls, they have technology to make these big uglies last forever! Distinguishing the city planner from the architect is difficult. Both are concerned with the total environment. One looks at the situation with field glasses, the other with a microscope. So for the purpose of this point, consider the two as one. The architect, therefore, wrecker or builder, is about the only one of the group who sponsors beauty. Admittedly he is not much of a warrior, but he is supposed to have been trained to fight. To have a better world -- beautiful as well as efficient -- the architect-planner must be the champion of the people.

Although the architect has done a very poor job till now in building good environment, he represents hope. The people's architects, whom Rice honors, give this hope. They represent the exceptions, but it is hoped that some day they will be the rule. Some day there should be enough good architects to make the market place a stimulating place, to plan dwellings in which the majority receive aesthetic pleasure from their every day environment, to produce low cost, beautiful churches that help each worshipper reach his God, to plan factories with the workers in mind as well as those on the board of directors, and to plan schools that help the millions of youngsters grow and develop in pleasant surroundings.

Historically great architects have worked for great and wealthy clients. Architect Sen Mut in 1500 B.C. worked with Queen Hatshepsut to build her temple. Architect Ictinus had Pericles for a client when he designed the Parthenon. During the Sixth Century A.D., Hagia Sophia was developed through the efforts of architects Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus who worked with the great Justinian. The Thirteenth Century architect, Pierre de Montereau, had no less an important client than Saint Louis IX, for whom he built Sante Chapelle in Paris. Architect Michaelangelo had several Popes for clients. Even the later-day architectural saints, Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe had their rich, influential patrons. But the rich patrons of the arts are becoming extinct. The last of these are a few art-conscious corporation boards. The church building committee, developer, city council, hospital board, county commissioners, school board, and the board of directors of the not-so-rich corporation are the rule.

It is no small task to produce good architecture under these circumstances. It takes great talent and patience to raise the aspirations of the multi-headed client -- the building committee. Persuasion and perfection plus great design skill are required to turn public funds into good architecture because taxpayers rarely act as art patrons. It also takes great skill to produce a beautiful, money-making building for a developer. But in spite of all these obstacles, some architects have been able to make our influential citizens more architecture-conscious. They have been able to create beauty with democratic action, and their buildings show it -- through dignity, humility and human values.

Last year, when the architectural faculty of Rice University began planning its semicentennial program, it considered the usual safe procedure: invite one of the architectural gods to preach in return for adequate pay and praise; but even the highly renowned living architects are tired of drum-beating. Therefore the faculty resolved to honor the new breed, the people's architects.

Contrary to what many think, architects are not here to please other architects. Unquestionably most architects receive extreme satisfaction from having other architects recognize their work, give them medals, certificates of excellence, and publish pretty pictures of their buildings. In the case of the latter, so many architects prefer pictures sans people. They don't want too many "scale figures" to distract from the architecture. They want architect-friends to see the work in its pure form -- free of people. This same attitude prevails in the planning of their buildings. They seem to have greater interest in form than in people.

Form-makers are important. The luster that the profession has bestowed upon the great should not in any way be tarnished. But this other group, the people's architects, should be recognized, too. These deserving architects have contributed to the achievement of humanistic architecture for the many. These architects, who do the most good in finding architectural answers to people's problems, deserve the recognition which Rice gave them.

Today, the opportunities for helping people through architecture are tremendous; they occur in every community. An example proving one building can help a lot of people is the case of a slum area near a great city. The neighborhood was sick. A form of sociological epilepsy existed. Without warning or obvious reason, school children became involved in sieges of violence. Parents advised their children to carry knives for self-protection. A new school was needed. One was built -- a good one. It had a potent therapeutic effect. The community's disturbances began to disappear. The people's confidence began to reappear. Neighbor began to trust neighbor. The kids put away their knives. The surrounding houses began to take on a cleaner look. The school became a symbol of better life. Here is architecture for the people, even by the people, because the architect encouraged teachers and parents to participate in the planning of their new school. Function takes on more significance when the planners are also the users. Architecture, too, becomes more meaningful when it has social implications.

It takes a special architect to lead and direct community participation. A certain receptiveness on the part of the architect was one reason for the sociological

progress. He could never have convinced the users of the building that it was their building had he displayed the extreme egotism that seems to characterize some of the self-proclaimed prima donnas. He was willing to give credit to the teachers and parents who participated in the planning of this school, and wisely he was deliberate in convincing the users that the building belonged to them. This is a difficult procedure, but if the design-talented architect has the leadership ability to stimulate and guide group action, and if he is able to place the welfare of his client at the level of his own tastes and prejudices, he can achieve great architecture. Moreover, he can derive great satisfaction from this achievement. In this way he is a people's architect. His architecture is a social art.

To this caliber of architect, architecture is not so much the expression of his personal tastes and favorite forms as it is a service to people. It is a human interest and altruistic sense that makes the difference between this practitioner and others. The architect is a conscientious leader and a designer. He is people-conscious -- so is his architecture.

There are not very many people's architects, but certainly more than the eight recognized by Rice University. Rice's selection will be questioned by historians and practitioners alike, but all great architects and architecture are controversial. Many thoughtful professionals were involved in the selection. These eight are representatives of the new type of architect. Each is especially sensitive to the needs of people, and, with a willingness to help people solve their problems within the means of their own pocketbooks, each helps public-spirited men and women

of building committees build handsome buildings, and successfully communicates with civic clubs, school boards and corporation building committees, and persuades public officials to build better towns and cities. To this breed of architect, architecture is a way of life.

The Rice honorees' architecture has diversity. They belong to no one "school" of the profession. They live in different regions. They have varying clientele. The scope and character of their projects most certainly are different; yet they have one thing in common, their primary interest in people. Herein lies their greatness.

THE RICE UNIVERSITY HONOREES

JOHN LYON REID, F.A.I.A., of San Francisco, California, is especially known for his school designs. He was the architectural keynoter for the Rice academic festival in October, 1962. His talk on the climate for design centered on the translation of human values into architecture. He believes the architecture of a community is a symbol of its people. It is the architect who shapes this environment; he must deal in more than facts and figures.

O'NEIL FORD, F.A.I.A., of San Antonio, Texas, is noted for his innovations in building methodology, and his designs for industry. In his November, 1962, presentation, he insisted that architects need to solve environmental problems, not just borrow solutions from other problems. He believes that an architect must have professional integrity to serve those for whom he works.

VICTOR GRUEN, F.A.I.A., of New York, is a designer of community shopping centers in the U.S. and abroad. In his presentation, January, 1963, he questioned the "why" and the "how" an architect is a person dedicated to improvement and service. His conclusion: to be an architect is to build, to create surroundings for human advancement and satisfaction; otherwise, he becomes a businessman selling products instead of professional services.

I. M. PEI, A.I.A., of New York, has done most of his design work in urban renewal through his exemplary planning and design of high density housing and office buildings. In his talk in February, 1963, he pleaded that architects must be educated to evaluate the entire scheme rather than dissect environment into small pieces, thus creating chaos.

VERNON DeMARS, A.I.A., of Los Angeles, California, made his presentation in March, 1963. He is a designer and planner for private and public housing and believes the architect must consider groups of people as collections of individuals, not as nonentities in an overall landscape. Each housing unit must be designed with the needs of the individual and his personality in mind, and provide him with a diversity of view and contact.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI, F.A.I.A., is a noted architect of churches and Dean, School of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In his visit, April, 1963, he expounded the need for self-discipline for the architect and the need to learn from nature the simple order which also applies to human values. He believes art form has its place equal to that of service. Architects who serve people must supply them with an aesthetically pleasing environment.

CHARLES M. GOODMAN, F.A.I.A., of Washington, D.C., has accomplished much in residential design. His designs for personal architecture are dictated by his basic compulsion to always do his best. To him this is a professional challenge for architects. Architecture is for people. When it reaches the grandiose, it becomes sterile and abstract, thus alienating the user and the designer from society. His presentation was in late April, 1963.

MARSHALL SHAFFER, A.I.A., was posthumously selected for honors because his professional life was dedicated to the erection of hospitals to enhance and prolong life. He served as an architect with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and his genius for organization and research and inspiration are still a dominant force in hospital design.

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